

## After Darkness by JanieTattoos

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Family, Friendship

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin H., Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Mike W.

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2018-01-23 11:49:28

**Updated:** 2018-03-11 08:28:48

**Packaged:** 2019-12-16 22:45:08

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 6

**Words:** 9,590

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** What happened immediately after El closed the gate and the Mind Flayer left Will? A multi-chapter fic on my take of what I think happened following that fateful night in Hawkins, Indiana in November 1984. Mileven, Lumax, Jancy, Dustin/Steve, Jopper, all included.

# 1. Chapter 1

A/N: Just a little note to say thank you so much for the wonderful feedback and likes on my first Stranger Things fic! The reception that it got has given me a new boost of confidence as a writer, and I can't wait to write even more fics for you, starting with this one. I'm still unsure how many chapters this fic will include, but please feel free to comment any suggestions for how you want the plot to develop, or what character pairings I should highlight! As always, comments are very much appreciated. Anyways, enjoy this first chapter of many!

---

"Where the fuck is she?"

"Hey, Wheeler, mind your language," retorted Steve with a glare, looking up at Mike. The teenager was pacing back and forth across the Byers' kitchen, the bandana from their earlier adventure into the tunnels still wrapped around his neck.

Mike stopped pacing to glare directly at Steve, who was lying on the couch and holding a tissue against his nose, which was still bleeding from his beating from Billy Hargrove. "You don't get it, Steve," Mike said, trying to retain his frustration. "I saw those things, I saw what they can do. God knows what they'll do to El if they find her."

Steve looked up at Mike and sighed. "They won't find her, alright? She's a fighter, and so is the Chief. They'll be fine. For God's sakes, just *stop pacing*."

"Steve's right, Mike," Dustin agreed, getting up off the floor and walking towards him. "Eleven can do literally *anything*, she can protect herself. Just let her do her thing." He was quiet for a few moments before adding, "And, uh, the pacing is actually a little bit annoying."

Mike just rolled his eyes and continued to pace back and forth, partly to annoy them further. They didn't understand. After over a year of wondering whether she was even alive or not, he had *finally* got El back in his life, and now the danger of her being taken away from him was present once more. He couldn't go through that again.

"Um, Mike?" Lucas interrupted Mike's train of thought from the kitchen table where he had been talking quietly to Max. Lucas pointed out the kitchen window, and Mike's eyes followed to find a set of car headlights shining through the house and lighting up the trail of paper sheets that still clung to every inch of the Byers' household.

"ELEVEN!" Mike roared. He flung open the door and bolted outside, not even caring about how freezing it was. But, to his disappointment, he found Jonathan's car instead. Nancy and Jonathan emerged from the front seats, completely dripping with sweat. Before Mike could ask them what the hell had happened, they had opened the side doors to help Joyce carry a limp and pale Will into the house.

Steve immediately got up from the couch when they came in, allowing Jonathan and Joyce to carefully lie Will down in his place. Joyce knelt down beside Will's head, stroking his soaking wet hair away from his face.

"You're gonna be okay, sweetie," she whispered, tears silently slipping down her cheeks. "You're safe now."

Jonathan and Nancy stood behind Joyce, completely speechless and exhausted. The rest of the Party joined Mike and gathered at Will's feet. They immediately started firing questions.

"What happened?" Lucas asked.

"Did he confront the Mind Flayer?" Dustin said.

"Have you heard from Hopper?" Mike pleaded.

Max stood beside Lucas in silence, unable to comprehend what the hell it was that she had gotten herself involved in.

"One at a time, guys! Jesus!" Steve sighed.

"It's gone," Joyce whispered eventually, patting Will's hand. "Whatever that thing was, it's out of him. He's gonna be okay. He just needs to rest."

Lucas nudged Dustin's side, both of them with smiles of relief on their faces. Max looked at Will sympathetically, the tension on her shoulders beginning to ease.

"And Eleven?" Mike asked, worry still on his face.

Joyce looked at him directly. "We haven't heard anything. Sorry, sweetie."

Mike gritted his teeth. He hated this - he hated not knowing what was going on. He just wished that they would come back. That *she* would come back.

At that moment, as if somebody was granting Mike's wish, he heard tires screeching outside the house. Unlike his delayed reaction from a few moments ago, Mike sprinted out the door before anyone could call his name. Sure enough, it was Hopper.

"Where is she? WHERE IS SHE?" he demanded, almost colliding with Hopper as he got out of the station wagon.

"Relax, kid, she's alright. She passed out for a bit afterwards, but she's alright. She did it." His voice was thick with emotion and disbelief. He opened the back seat door, to where Eleven was lying. Dried blood surrounded her nose and outer ears, but aside from that, she was absolutely fine. She was still his El.

Hopper carefully lifted her out of the back seat and into his arms, carrying her inside with Mike marching right beside them. Once inside, he laid her on the kitchen table. Mike instantly sat down on one of the kitchen chairs, grabbing El's hand in his.

"Stay with her for a second," Hopper ordered, "I need to talk to Joyce for a sec."

*As if I'm gonna leave her now,* Mike thought to himself, but he just nodded in response.

Mike recognised the hesitation to leave El on Hopper's face, but after a few moments, the Chief left the kitchen. After glancing into the living room to make sure that they were completely alone, Mike shook El's shoulder gently. "El. El, can you hear me?"

She opened her eyes ever so slightly. "Mike," she replied, her voice barely a whisper. Her throat felt as if it had been torn apart from all the screaming she had done whilst closing the gate. "I did it. I closed the gate."

Mike smiled. "Yeah, Hopper told me. I'm so proud of you, I knew you could do it."

"How's Will?" she whispered, her voice strained.

"He's okay, too. Everything is okay. You're safe now. And I'm not letting you go ever again."

El gave Mike a tired smile, which made his heart grow three times bigger. "Promise?" she asked, already losing consciousness again.

"Promise," Mike responded. He leaned in to press a quick but gentle kiss to her cheek, seconds before Hopper came back into the kitchen. Although he didn't fully see Mike doing it, he saw enough to feel the need to say something.

"Look kid," he started, pinching the bridge of his nose, "we'll talk about it in detail another time, but I just want to say this now - I know you care about her, but you need to remember that she's vulnerable. I don't want any funny business with you two, not for a couple of years at least. She's confused enough as it is."

Mike's cheeks went a slight pink as he realised what Hopper was implying. He reluctantly let go of El's hand and stood up from his chair.

"I would never hurt her, and I think I've proven that. I only want what's best for El. And as for taking advantage of her, I wouldn't even consider it. I just want her to be happy."

Hopper's eyes narrowed. "Hmm. Alright. Just know that I'm watching you, Wheeler."

Mike rolled his eyes slightly and was about to return to his seat beside El before Hopper spoke again.

"No, don't sit back down - come into the living room for a few

minutes. We all have a few things to discuss."

Mike looked back at Hopper, standing his ground. "I'm not leaving her."

"Neither am I, kid," Hopper said with slight sarcasm. "We're gonna take her in too, obviously. We need to talk about how the fuck we're going to handle everything that's happened tonight."

## 2. Chapter 2

"Alright, so we have a few things to discuss," Hopper began.

Everyone was standing in the Byers' living room - with the exceptions of El and Will, who were occupying both of the couches. Both Will and El were conscious but still too weak to sit up or stand. The broken glass and weapons from a few hours previously were still scattered on the floor. Everyone's gaze was fixated on Hopper as he began to speak.

"First of all, this goes without saying: anything that has been said - or will be said - in this house tonight, stays in this house. Just because the gate is now closed does not mean that we're automatically in the clear. We still need to be careful."

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement except for Mike, who looked to his left to find El looking at him, too, with disappointment in her eyes. They were both thinking the same thing.

"What about El?" Mike asked, tearing his eyes away from her. "Surely you're not gonna hide her away again for another year?"

Hopper looked down at his boots, unable to look the kid in the eyes. "I don't know yet..."

"BULLSHIT," Mike yelled.

"Mike," Nancy warned, casting a disapproving glare at her brother, which he ignored.

"No," Mike cut across, "he can't do this, he can't- I haven't seen her in over a year, and now you're taking her away again? It's complete bullshit! She deserves a normal life with her friends! She's been through enough as it is, she's miserable, can't you tell?" It took everything in Mike's power for him to not go over and start punching Hopper again.

Hopper finally looked up at Mike as his last words sunk in. He would never admit it, but they did sting a little. "Look kid, I'm not

intentionally trying to make her miserable, I'm trying to keep her *safe*. Isn't that more important?"

Silence ensued for a few moments as Mike considered his response. "Yes," he sighed reluctantly. "But that doesn't mean that she should be banished from society either. Or her friends."

Hopper pinched the bridge of his nose. *Christ, this kid is nothing but persistent*, he thought. "Okay. How about we set up a little arrangement. Frequent supervised visits. Once a week, at least."

Mike's eyes lit up. "Seriously?"

"Yes," Hopper nodded, exhaustion beginning to settle into his eyes. "But they will be supervised, and only held at the cabin - for now, at least. And only you five are allowed to visit. No strangers," he added, nodding to Dustin, Lucas and Max as well, who were standing at the foot of Will's couch.

"That won't be a problem, Chief, we're a pretty exclusive Party," Dustin joked with a smirk, which resulted in Lucas, Will and Max rolling their eyes.

"That's alright, absolutely," Mike rushed, ignoring Dustin's comment, already afraid that Hopper would suddenly change his mind. "Thanks, Hopper."

Hopper smiled a little. "You're welcome." His eyes then moved to the couch in front of him, to where El was lying. "How does that sound, kid?" he said, already knowing the answer.

El replied with a weak smile, glancing at her friends. "Perfect."

Hopper smiled back. "Good. We'll set one up for next week."

Both El and Mike's smiles dampened a little. "Why not tomorrow?" Mike protested.

Hopper laughed slightly. "Have a little patience, kid. I know you're all eager to hang out together properly, but El needs to recover for a few days before she can have visitors."



El opened her mouth to object, but Hopper cut her off. "Plus, the cabin isn't in the best state right now, so we need to sort that out too. We'll talk about that later, El," he added, giving her a knowing glare, which made El look down in shame at the blanket covering her. That was a conversation that she definitely didn't want to have.

"Alright, next thing," Hopper continued. "So - what the hell happened to him?"

Hopper's finger pointed at Steve - particularly Steve's busted-up face - as he stood beside Joyce.

"And why do you have a rainbow band aid on your forehead?" Nancy said with a slight smirk.

"That was Dustin," Lucas said, shaking his head at the boy standing beside him. "He didn't realise that band aids aren't the same thing as *stitches*."

"Hey, it's the thought that counts!" Dustin retorted, shoving Lucas, which started a squabble between the pair.

"Alright, ALRIGHT!" Hopper intervened, clapping his hands loudly. Lucas and Dustin immediately stopped and separated themselves by a few inches. "Now," Hopper sighed, "you *still* haven't answered my question."

"It was my brother," Max piped up. The redhead had been quiet throughout this whole conversation, feeling a little irrelevant as she barely knew Will and El clearly didn't want anything to do with her. "Billy Hargrove. He found out that I was here and tried to kill Lucas, but Steve stepped in and... that happened," she concluded, referencing Steve's bloodied face.

"He tried to kill you?" Will said, staring at Lucas with wide eyes.

"Jesus, Steve, what were you thinking?" Nancy exclaimed, looking over at her ex-boyfriend. "That guy is crazy - no offence, Max-"

"None taken, believe me," Max assured.

"-and I've heard countless rumours about what he's done in the past. I

mean, he could've killed you!" Nancy finished.

"*But he didn't!*" Steve sighed, already done with the conversation. "Look, if I hadn't have stepped in, then it would be Lucas that would have these injuries right now instead of me. These dumbasses-" he said, pointing at the kids, "-were put in my care, and I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I let something happen to them. All I'm asking for is a little perspective, alright?"

The room fell silent for a few moments. "Alright," Nancy said quietly.

"I think we should get you checked out, though," Joyce piped up, her motherly instincts kicking in. She examined Steve's face. "I'm no nurse, but I'm pretty sure your nose is broken."

Steve shrugged. "That can wait till tomorrow. It's late anyways."

"Exactly," Hopper cut in, "which is why we need to keep going with this. Now, Max," he turned to face the redhead, "did Billy see anything suspicious when he was here?"

"No," Max replied.

"Okay, good," Hopper said. "We're gonna keep it that way. We need to keep suspicion as low as possible. Now, do any of your parents know that you're here?"

The kids shifted their feet awkwardly and remained silent.

"I'm gonna take that as a no," Hopper said. "Right, well, you all look exhausted, so I suggest that we all stay here for the night- if you don't mind, Joyce," he added.

"No, not at all," Joyce said quickly. She didn't say it, but she was grateful that Hopper was giving her a distraction from thinking about Bob.

"Alright. The girls can sleep in here, and the boys can take Will's room. *No objections*," he added, as Mike and El looked disheartened.

He looked to the eldest Wheeler in the room. "Nancy, would you mind helping El clean up?"

"Not a problem," Nancy said, instantly moving to help El off the couch.

Hopper clapped his hands. "Alright, chop chop. I want lights out in an hour."

Everyone quickly dispersed to either help Joyce set up the extra beds or to clean themselves up. Hopper slowly looked around the now-empty living room at the mess that they had managed to make in just a couple of hours.

It was going to be a long night.

### 3. Chapter 3

With Hopper's order to get cleaned up in place, Nancy immediately rushed to aid El. She was still slightly overwhelmed about seeing the little girl again without warning, after only meeting her briefly last year. Like her younger brother, Nancy had been almost certain that El was dead - or gone for good at least. But she should've known better; El's resilience has never failed to shock them all.

Slipping one arm around her waist, Nancy helped El off the couch as the rest of Joyce's honorary guests went to organise the house for the night. El groaned slightly as Nancy pulled her up, almost collapsing back onto the couch again as her knees threatened to cave in.

"C'mon, El, we can do this. The bathroom is just down there," Nancy encouraged, pointing her head at the hallway in front of them.

El clung onto Nancy's waist for dear life as her head spun a little. Closing the gate had evaporated every ounce of energy from her. She forced herself to stay upright as Nancy supported her weight. Together, they eventually made it into the bathroom. El resisted the urge to collapse onto the tiles right there and then. Nancy guided her over to the toilet and gently sat her down, letting her catch her breath.

"I'm gonna run you a nice bath, okay?" Nancy said gently, kneeling down in front of El and stroking her back. "I'm sure Joyce has bubble bath that we can use, that will make it extra nice. Does that sound good?"

El didn't have the faintest clue what 'bubble bath' was, but it sounded lovely, so she just nodded her head in response. Nancy smiled down at her and went over to the bath, turning on the hot tap as far as it could go. Walking back over to El, she then reached over El's head to where Joyce had a container full of products. Her eyes quickly caught the half-empty container of bubble bath. She grabbed it and showed it to El, who looked at it curiously.

"This... is bubbles?" El said, looking at the light blue liquid with confusion.

Nancy smiled. "It will be in a second. Hang on."

Nancy opened the container lid and spilled some of it into the bath, which was quickly filling up with steaming water. She then rolled up her sleeves, bent down and swished her hands around in the bath. El watched in amazement as huge, floating things began to appear in the bath.

Once she was satisfied that there were enough bubbles, Nancy turned around to El with a smile. "See? It's a bubble bath now."

El smiled in astonishment. "Bubbles," she murmured. "Can I get in now?" she added quickly. She was excited to have a bath that didn't involve her having to go into the Void.

"You can get in in a few minutes, it's nearly done. We need to get these clothes off you first," Nancy ordered as she bent down to start untying El's shoes. "And that make-up, too," she added, giving El a smile. "Although judging by Mike's face, he'll be sorry to see it go." Nancy chuckled to herself.

"What do you mean?" El asked.

Nancy paused and looked up at El. "I just mean that... well... it's pretty clear to me that you mean a lot to Mike. He hasn't been himself since you left, and it was breaking my heart cause I wasn't sure how to help him. I can tell how much he cares about you, especially by his face from when you walked through the door earlier!" Nancy laughed.

El blushed and looked down at her bare feet, wriggling her toes. Mike cared about her, and she definitely cared about him.

Once Nancy had successfully removed El's clothes, she helped her over to the bath and carefully guided her in, one foot at a time. El sighed contentedly as the hot water soothed every ache in her body. She leaned back against the bath, closing her eyes with a smile, thinking about how good her life was at that moment - everyone she cared about was alive, the gate was closed, and she had Mike back again.

Mike.

She suddenly remembered something. A question that she had been waiting to ask ever since she'd started watching the show *Days Of Our Lives* on her little TV in the cabin. She knew that she couldn't ask Hopper about it; he always rolled his eyes when he saw her watching the show and muttered something like "pointless crap" under his breath. It needed to be someone who knew about this stuff, who could make El understand it all. Someone like...

"Nancy?" El asked, opening her eyes again.

"Mmm-hmm?" Nancy answered, as she gently washed out the gel from El's hair.

"What... is a *boyfriend*?"

Nancy almost choked on her on saliva. She looked at El, whose expression was filled with pure innocence, and tried not to embarrass her by laughing. Judging by El's lack of social knowledge, Nancy guessed that El had been waiting to ask someone this question, and didn't know how to bring it up in conversation. Nancy reigned back her emotions; she needed to handle this carefully.

"Where did you hear that word, El?" she asked.

"On TV," El replied simply. "*Days Of Our Lives*. They say it a lot. And 'girlfriend' too. What do they mean?"

Although she found it a little bit funny that El was highly invested in soap operas, she was a bit relieved that she hadn't discovered that word from Mike. Nancy was sure that it would eventually happen in time, but not yet - they were still too young, and she was sure that Hopper would kill her if she encouraged her brother and El's relationship any further.

Nancy thought about her next choice of words. "Well, a boyfriend is a boy who you care about a lot. And who cares about you. And... you spend a lot of time together, and you hold hands, and you look after each other. Things like that." She was unsure how much sex education El had received so far in her life, but Nancy guessed that it

wasn't much. She knew that she would have to explain it to her soon, but not now. That conversation could wait for another day.

El thought about Nancy's definition. "So... does that mean that Mike is my boyfriend?"

*Oh shit.* "Not really..." Nancy said, trying to find a way to climb out of this hole that El had dug her into.

El looked at her confusingly. "But you said that Mike cares about me, and I care about him, so why would he not be my boyfriend?"

"Because... because... being someone's boyfriend or girlfriend is a big deal. You kind of have to ask the person and talk about it with them before you can call them that. Do you get it?"

El nodded slightly. "Yes. I think so. When do I ask Mike then?"

Nancy resisted the urge to bury her face in her hands. She continued washing El's hair to distract herself. "Sweetie, I think you and Mike should wait before you talk about all this stuff. You've been gone for a long time, so you should just enjoy being together again for now. All of this boyfriend stuff can wait - you care about each other, and that's all that matters. Okay?" She smiled at the young girl as she began to rinse her hair.

El considered this for a few moments before replying. "Okay," she said eventually, smiling back. "Thank you."

"No problem," Nancy replied, "I'm happy to help. If you ever want to talk to me about anything, just ask."

"Okay, well I have another question," El said, holding her head back so that Nancy could clean the last of the suds from her hair.

"What is it?" Nancy asked. She braced herself for El's question; What is sex? What is a condom? How do you know that you love someone? But El's question, surprisingly, turned out to be none of those - it was actually something that Nancy never could have predicted.

El giggled slightly before speaking.

"So, is Jonathan *your* boyfriend now?"



## 4. Chapter 4

A/N: Sorry for the delay in updates - I returned to university this week so I've been busy settling back in! Thank you so much for the feedback so far on this story, all of the likes and comments have been very motivational! As always, I'm open to suggestions regarding where you want me to take this story, and comments are always appreciated. Enjoy!

---

"Why aren't you in bed?"

Joyce turned her head to find Hopper standing at the doorway to Will's bedroom, watching her as she sat in a chair beside Will's bed as he slept off his exhaustion.

Joyce sighed and stroked Will's hair gently. "I gave Jonathan my room so that Steve could sleep in his. I can't sleep, anyways. I can't bring myself to leave him."

Hopper walked over and knelt down in front of her. The bags under her eyes became much clearer now that he was face to face with her. "He's fine, Joyce. That thing's gone, you said so yourself."

"But what if it isn't, Hop?" Joyce argued, her eyes beginning to glisten with tears. "I mean, when we brought him out of that place last year, we assumed that he would be okay, but he wasn't. What if we're wrong again? What if he *never* gets over this?". She buried her face in her hands.

Hopper reached out and slowly prised Joyce's hands away from her face. He then took them in his own, trying to give her some sense of comfort. "I don't know if he will. None of us do. But what I *do* know is that he has you, and Jonathan, and I know those friends of his would do anything for him." He nodded towards Dustin, Lucas and Mike, who filled up the rest of the floor space around Will's bed as they slept. Hopper looked back at Joyce. "He's not alone in this, and neither are you."

Joyce nodded her head and tried to smile as the tears slipped down

her cheeks. "Thank you," she whispered, squeezing his hands gently. She glanced at the clock beside her on Will's bedside table - it read 3:42am. "Shouldn't you be in bed too?" she asked Hopper with a slight hint of sarcasm.

Hopper rolled his eyes before answering. "Nah, I couldn't sleep either. I keep going in there to check on El, to make sure she's alright," he said, pointing his head towards the living room to where El, Nancy and Max were also fast asleep.

Joyce smiled. "How are you handling it?" she asked.

"What?" Hopper asked in confusion.

Joyce rolled her eyes. "C'mon Hop. *El*. You're looking after a teenage girl now - surely that can't be easy. At least, it doesn't sound like it is," she added, referring to Hopper's very public warning to El during their group meeting.

Hopper bowed his head and sighed. "Honestly, I don't have a clue what I'm doing, Joyce. Especially with this situation with the Wheeler kid-

"Yeah, about that..." Joyce interrupted.

Hopper lifted his head and narrowed his eyes. "What?"

"I just think that you shouldn't be so hard on those two. El has been through a lot, and so has Mike, and they just... they deserve a little happiness, don't you think?"

"No, I *don't* think," Hopper said with irritation. "Not *that* kind of happiness, anyways. They're only thirteen."

Joyce's lips curved up slightly into a smile. "C'mon, you need to put yourself in their shoes. You remember what it's like to be young and in love, right?"

Hopper scoffed, but in actual fact, yes, he did remember. He also remembered what it's like to be middle-aged and in love with the same woman from all those years ago. The same woman who was currently sitting in front of him and poking fun at him. But of course,

he didn't say that.

"I guess," he said reluctantly.

Joyce nodded with satisfaction. "Okay. So, you need to go easy on them. Stop giving them such a hard time, especially Mike."

Hopper sighed. "It's just... she's really fragile, and I don't want anything to happen to her. I don't want her to get hurt."

Joyce smiled sympathetically, rubbing Hopper's hands. "I know, and she won't. Mike cares about her a lot, I can tell. You just need to find a balance with them. But shutting him out of her life isn't going to help anything."

"I guess you're right," Hopper nodded, accepting the advice with an air of unwillingness. "So," he said, changing the conversation topic, "how are you holding up?"

Joyce looked up at him, her eyes weary and broken as a new wave of grief washed over her. "I've been better," she said, her voice breaking slightly.

Her eyes quickly filled with tears, and Hopper immediately regretted bringing up the subject. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything-"

"No, no, it's.. it's fine," Joyce reassured, breaking her hands away from his to wipe away her tears. She paused for a few moments. "I just keep wondering if I could've prevented it somehow, or... maybe I should've gone with him-"

"No," Hopper said firmly, putting his hands on her shoulders. "Joyce, you can't think like that. There was nothing any of us could've done to change his mind, alright? Bob... he was a fighter, he wanted to go alone. He wanted to help you and Will."

"It's just..." Joyce said, wiping her eyes, "I don't think I'll ever be able to forgive myself. He sacrificed himself for my family, for me. He didn't deserve it. And I..."

Joyce then broke down completely, giving in to the rolls of grief that continued to knock through her. Hopper immediately wrapped his

arms around her and pulled her into a hug, rubbing her back.

"It's alright, Joyce," he soothed, patting her hair as she sobbed into his shoulder. "Everything is going to be alright."

They stayed like that for several minutes, until Joyce's tears eventually subsided. She leaned out of Hopper's embrace and set her hands on his knees. "You should, uh... get some sleep."

Hopper stayed put in his chair. "Are you sure you don't want me to stay here?"

"I'm fine," Joyce insisted, putting on a brave face. "Really, Hop. Get some rest."

Hopper nodded. He got up from his chair and opened the bedroom door, but continued to linger. "If you need anything, I'll be in the kitchen, okay?"

Joyce nodded. "Really, I'll be fine. Goodnight, Hopper."

"Goodnight, Joyce," Hopper replied, before closing the door.

After double-checking that El was still asleep in the living room, he went into the kitchen and lit up a cigarette, sliding into the kitchen chair next to him. Once he'd finished smoking, he eventually closed his eyes and succumbed to sleep, but not before making a promise to himself:

*Never let anything bad happen to Joyce Byers ever again.*

## 5. Chapter 5

A/N: I've had quite a few requests recently to write more Mileven-centric chapters, so that's what I've done for this one, and the following chapter will also be heavily Mileven-based as well. This chapter is a lot longer than what I usually write, so enjoy - and as always, comments are appreciated!

---

Hopper awoke at 7:42am the next morning to the smell of bacon and eggs being cooked just a few feet away from him. He lifted his head slowly - his neck tense from his awkward sleeping position by the kitchen table - to see Joyce with her back to him, trying to toss three frying pans worth of food at once.

"Let me help," Hopper said, his voice a little croaky from the deep sleep he had been in. He carefully arose from his chair and made his way over to Joyce, hovering behind her shoulder.

Joyce looked behind her and rolled her eyes, but gratefully accepted the offer of help. She was used to only having to cook for herself, Jonathan and Will, so suddenly having to cook for herself, Hopper, three teenagers and six almost-teenagers was a bit daunting.

Hopper took the tongs from her hand and began to turn the bacon slices that Joyce had missed. "I can manage this, why don't you stick on some toast for everyone?" Hopper suggested.

"Alright," Joyce nodded, feeling grateful but also slightly deflated that she couldn't even manage to cook a simple amount of food for her guests by herself.

El awoke at seven-four-six to the smell of what Hopper described as 'normal food' (although she wasn't sure what kind of 'normal food' just yet) and to the sound of a quiet conversation in the kitchen, most likely between Hopper and Joyce.

She slowly lifted her head off the couch to take in her surroundings; Nancy and that girl Max were still asleep on the couches opposite her; Joyce was rushing around the kitchen table, putting knives and

forks beside every seat; faint sunlight was beginning to break through the windows and bounce off the drawings that still remained on every surface of the house. El rubbed her eyes and sat up properly on the couch, pulling the blanket that had been draped over her close to her chest. She wondered if Mike was still asleep. She wondered if he had dreamt about her, like she had dreamt about him all night. She had replayed the memory of their reunited hug over and over again in her head. The word 'soon' had finally come to an end; she and Mike were together again, and nothing was ever going to separate them.

She wanted to see him right there and then. She had wanted to talk to him last night after she had had her bath, but Hopper ordered Nancy to put her straight to bed without a word to Mike. El wondered if this is what it was going to be like from now on - she knew that Hopper had meant his promise of visits from Mike to the cabin, but she also knew that Hopper would be watching their every move. It wouldn't be the same as when she had first met Mike, when she had spent a week in his basement and they had had endless amounts of privacy. That freedom was definitely gone now. All she wanted was a few undisturbed minutes with Mike, just like how it had been before they gotten separated.

She really wanted to see him. She wanted to see him *now*.

El slid forward to the other end of the couch and stretched over the side. She could see Hopper and Joyce, clearly busy making food for everyone. El guessed that she had at least ten minutes of freedom before they would call her and the others into the kitchen for breakfast. It wasn't a lot of time, but she would take it regardless.

El quietly got up off the couch and crept over to Nancy. The older girl was still fast asleep, but if El didn't wake her up, then her newly formed plan wasn't going to work.

El gently reached out to Nancy and shook her shoulder gently. "Nancy. Nancy," she whispered, "wake up!"

Nancy opened her eyes and screwed up her nose. "What is it, El?"

"I need you to help me," El whispered.

Nancy sat up properly then, both intrigued and a little alarmed. "Help you? With what?"

"I need to talk to Mike, but Hopper doesn't like me and Mike being alone. If he asks where I am, can you tell him..."

"That you're in the bathroom or something?" Nancy suggested.

"Yes. Bathroom. That will work," El smiled.

Nancy smiled in return, but narrowed her eyes slightly. "I thought you didn't like lies, El? *Friends don't lie*, remember?"

El's cheeks turned pink. "I know. But this is different," she insisted, pleading to Nancy with her huge brown eyes.

Nancy tutted with a smile. "It's alright, I'm only joking with you. I'll cover for you. Now, go and get Mike before Hopper sees you."

El grinned with relief. "Thank you, Nancy!"

Nancy then put a finger to her own lips and jerked her head in the direction of Will's bedroom.

El nodded in understanding. After peering into the kitchen to double-check that Hopper was still occupied with cooking, El tiptoed across the living room and slipped into the Byers' hallway. She had a brief moment of panic when she saw the four closed doors and realised that she didn't have a clue which one was Will's room. Luckily, the first door on her right was ajar, so she decided to take a chance. She peeked her head through the gap and breathed a sigh of relief. Her eyes met Will, fast asleep in his own bed, with Lucas and Dustin in sleeping bags on the floor beside the bed. And there, right in front of El's feet, was Mike. His hair was messy from turning in his sleeping bag, and his cheeks were rosy. El smiled at the sight of him as her heart grew five times bigger. He looked so peaceful that she almost didn't want to wake him up, but she also couldn't afford to waste precious time alone with him. She slipped through the gap in the door and went down on her knees beside Mike's head.

"Mike. *Mike*". She had to restrain herself from yelling at him.

Mike's eyes fluttered open and his lips instantly curved into a smile as soon as his eyes met hers. "El!" he exclaimed, struggling to contain his happiness of seeing her. He sat up immediately and hugged her. El buried her face in his neck, hiding her smile.

When they pulled apart a few moments later, El asked, "Do you want to go somewhere, just you and me?"

Mike could see the nervousness on El's face. "Does Hopper know about this?"

El shook her head, her eyes pleading with him to say yes, for him to feel the same need to be together that she felt. "Nancy said that she would... cover for me?" She said the phrase hesitantly, unsure of its actual meaning but confident enough that it meant that Nancy would help her out.

Mike's smile grew even bigger. He made a mental note to thank Nancy at the first chance he'd get. "Great! We'll go in a second," he promised. "I just need to tell Dustin first."

El looked at him confusingly. "Why? Are you bringing him too?" She loved Dustin, but she also didn't want him invading her private (and precious) time with Mike.

Mike covered his mouth to stop himself from laughing. "No no no! See, Nancy's covering for you, right? So I need Dustin to cover for me, just in case."

"Oh," El said, suddenly feeling stupid.

Mike sensed her frustration with herself and took her hand in his. "It's okay, El, I just need to tell Dustin, and then we'll be alone for a bit, alright?"

"Yes," she replied, her lips curving into a gentle smile.

Mike squeezed her hand and then slipped out of his sleeping bag as quietly as he could. He crept the few meters distance over to Dustin's sleeping bag, where he was snoring quietly on his side. Mike shook Dustin's shoulder harshly. "Dustin. Dustin, *wake up.*"



Dustin gave a disapproving groan as he rolled over on his back to find Mike looking down at him. "Mike, c'mon. It's half nine. On a *Saturday*. Considering the shit that went down yesterday, I think I deserve at least a little bit of a lie in."

"You can go back to sleep in a second, I just need you to cover for me if anyone asks where I am. Especially Hopper."

"Why? What are you-?" Dustin began to ask. He then looked past Mike's head to find El standing beside Mike's sleeping bag, fiddling with the sleeve of Joyce's old sweatshirt that she was wearing. "Oh Christ," Dustin said, glaring back at Mike, "*please* tell me you're not running off together."

"What? No!" Mike exclaimed, secretly praying that El hadn't heard him and that she wouldn't ask him about what Dustin meant. "Of course not. We're just going to find a quiet place in the house so we can talk by ourselves."

"Talk and...?" Dustin quizzed, raising his eyebrows teasingly.

"*We're just gonna talk*," Mike said through gritted teeth, his cheeks slowly turning red. "Now, are you gonna cover for me or not?"

"Yes, yes, alright, I'll cover for you," Dustin sighed. "Just let me get back to sleep."

"Thank you," Mike sighed with relief before adding, "Night, night, Sleeping Beauty."

"Shut your face," Dustin retorted, his voice muffled by his pillow.

Mike resisted the urge to skip back to El with glee. It was half past nine in the morning, on a *Saturday*, and still Mike felt like the happiest person on the planet. The Mind Flayer was gone, El was back in his life, and he was about to have a few minutes alone with her. He didn't think life could get any better.

El greeted him once more with a grin. "Ready?" she asked, offering her hand for Mike to take, her big brown eyes melting his heart into a puddle.

"Ready," he replied with a smile, lacing his fingers with hers.

And with that, his life just got even better.

---

**A/N:** Okay, so I know I'm being incredibly mean by leaving it there and not including Mileven's conversation in this chapter as well, but I've been working on this chapter for over a week now so I really wanted to just get it uploaded for you guys, and I didn't want it to become too long either. So, I'm afraid you're gonna have to wait until the next chapter to hear what Mike and El have to say to each other. It's gonna be a good one though, I promise! Anyways, thank you so much for reading, and let me know what you think of this!

## 6. Chapter 6

A/N: I'm currently hiding in shame at how long it's taken me to write this chapter and post it for you guys. I usually try to not let the gaps between each chapter stretch for any longer than a week, but this particular chapter was so daunting for me that it took me a while to even start it. In my mind, this was the most important chapter (so far) in this fic, and I was terrified (and still am, really) that I wouldn't do it justice. Mileven chapters are also my most requested ones, so I knew that I had to get it right. Anyways, I've seen your comments both on Tumblr and asking me to keep posting, so I'm back! I'm truly sorry that it's taken me so long to get back into this fic, and I'm so grateful for your patience. I'll try and stay on track for now on. So, without further ado, here is the most requested chapter of After Darkness! As always, comments are greatly appreciated.

---

It only took Mike and El a few moments to decide that the Byers' bathroom would be the safest place - and really the only place - to have their private conversation. El had initially suggested that they talk outside on the porch, but Mike had ruled that out instantly as his mind imagined the anger on Hopper's face if he opened the front door and saw them alone together.

So, their only remaining option was the bathroom. El dragged Mike by the hand and marched straight into the bathroom, immediately locking the door behind them with her telekinetic powers. The urgency on El's face as she turned around to face him made Mike start to worry.

"El, are you alright? You seem a little-"

El cut off Mike's ability to finish his sentence as she flung her arms around him, burying him into a hug. Mike was initially stunned by El's sudden movement but relaxed into the hug after a few moments, stroking her back.

"I'm scared." El's words were muffled as her face pressed into Mike's collarbone.

Mike pulled out of the hug ever so slightly to look at her, but kept his arms firmly wrapped around her back. "You're scared? Of what?" He knew her nightmares and fears of the Bad Men were still an occurrence, but the Mind Flayer was gone. What did she have left to be afraid of?

El swallowed. "Losing you again. Hopper being mad at me. Being alone again."

Hearing her say her worst fears in that small, timid voice of hers made Mike want to wrap her up in a blanket and never let her go. Even after everything she'd been through, she was *still* terrified that everyone was going to turn against her.

"Come here." Mike took her hand and pulled her down with him onto the bathroom tiles. They sat legs-crossed facing each other, their hands intertwined. Mike locked his eyes with hers to ensure that what he was about to say would definitely sink in.

"El, *you're not gonna lose me*. The Bad Men are gone, the gate is closed, the Mind Flayer is gone. There's nothing left to separate us." He hesitated for a moment, not sure whether he should go on and say what he wanted to say. He didn't want to upset her further. But, at the same time, she needed to know how he felt about her. He wanted her to know.

"When you left, I didn't know what to do with myself; I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't focus on anything. I was lost without you." A small shiver went down Mike's spine as his mind flashed back to those awful three-hundred-and-fifty-three days without her. "I need you in my life, El, so I'm not gonna let anything hurt you, or take you away ever again. You're gonna get to stay here, with me. And Hopper, and Will, and Dustin, and Lucas, and Joyce, and everyone else who loves you."

El's cheeks blushed as she looked down at their joined hands. She wanted to reiterate the fact he had joined his name among the list of people that supposedly 'love' her, but she had something else to ask him first that was more important.

"Do you think Hopper still loves me after what I did?"

Mike's brows furrowed. "What did you do?"

El took no hesitation in replying. "I ran away and found my sister."

El's sheer bluntness took Mike aback. His eyes widened in shock as her statement sunk in. "You... you have a *sister*?"

"Yes. Her name is Kali. Eight." El lifted her hands away from Mike's briefly to lift up her sleeve. She pointed to the "011" tattoo on her left wrist. "Eight."

Mike nodded his head slowly in understanding. *Of course. She wasn't the only experiment.*

"Where did you find her?" Mike asked, reclaiming El's hands in his own once more.

El's face twisted into concentration as she sounded out the unfamiliar syllables. "Chi-ca-go?"

"You went to *Chicago*?" Mike said in wonderment, trying to keep his voice down under the circumstances. If Hopper found out they were in here alone, they would be screwed.

"Yes." El was unsure as to whether she should elaborate any further.

As El's revelations began to sink in, Mike suddenly had a thought. "Hang on... if this Kali is your 'sister' and if she has her own tattoo like yours, then that must mean... she has powers, too, doesn't she?"

"Yes," El nodded, her face completely serious. "But not the same as mine. She can make people see things."

"See things?" Mike questioned.

"Yes," El nodded. "She made me see a butterfly, even though there wasn't really a butterfly there."

Mike's head nodded in understanding. "Okay, okay..." He couldn't get over this. El went to *Chicago*. She had a *sister*. Probably not a biological one, but a sister all the same.

"There's more." El's voice suddenly went quiet and timid again, which made Mike's heart sink and made his mind go to a terrible place.

"El, Kali didn't... she didn't *hurt* you, did she?"

"No," El said, "but I nearly hurt someone. Kali wanted me to kill a man who helped Papa, and I was going to, because Papa hurt my Mama, but then I saw that the man had children, and I couldn't do it. Then I saw you in the Void. You were yelling and you were upset. I tried to reach you, but..." El's throat began to close up as tears rolled down her cheeks. "You just disappeared. I needed to help you, so I came back. I came back home."

They both sat in silence for a few moments as the severity of what El had just said washed over them. Mike's brain was still whirling around in amazement when he eventually broke the silence.

"So... you're worried about how Hopper is going to react to all of this?"

El nodded, tears still silently sliding down her face. "When we talked in the car on the way to the gate, he told me he wasn't mad at me. But I'm scared that when I tell him about my sister and the man, he will be mad again. I don't want him to be mad, Mike." El fully broke down then, and Mike instantly pulled her onto his lap and wrapped his arms around her. He *hated* seeing her like this.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, barely moving at all. El's tears slid down onto Mike's pyjamas as he cradled her with his chin on top of her head, wishing that he could somehow take all of this pain away from her.

Mike eventually broke the silence away from El's sobs, but still kept her tightly in his arms. "Listen, El. I don't think Hopper is going to be mad at you."

"No?" El asked quietly, her voice muffled by Mike's pyjama top.

"No," Mike reassured, resting his cheek against the side of El's head. "Hopper loves you too much to be mad at you. If he said that he's not mad at you, then I believe him."

"But what about the man?" El asked, fear in her voice. "He will be mad at me for that."

"But he shouldn't be," Mike insisted, hugging her tighter. "*You didn't kill the man, El.* You stopped yourself from killing him, and that's a very, very good thing. Hopper can't be mad at you for saving that man's life."

El nodded weakly, hoping beyond hope that Mike was right. "And Kali?"

"He won't be mad about that, either," Mike reassured her. "Knowing that you have a sister is *good* news, El, not bad."

El nodded again. She lifted her head ever so slightly, just enough to be able to look at Mike. "Thank you," she said with a weak smile.

"You have nothing to thank me for," Mike insisted with a smile. El tucked her head back underneath Mike's chin, wrapping her arms around his lower back.

They stayed like that for a few moments more, both of them never wanting to leave each other's sides. With her worries about Hopper beginning to dim, El's mind returned to the second most pressing question that she wanted to ask Mike.

"Mike?" she said quietly, lifting her head once more to look at him.

"Yeah?" Mike replied, looking down at her.

El's cheeks blushed lightly when she spoke. "You said you loved me before I told you about Hopper."

If El's cheeks were blushing a light pink, then Mike's cheeks were now the shade of a fully-grown tomato. "Uhhh... I, um... I just... Uhhh... You don't have to..." *Pull yourself together, Wheeler.*

El resisted the urge to laugh at how adorable he was being. Instead, she just locked her big, brown eyes with his, and said sincerely, "I love you too, Mike."

Those four words were the only thing that could've stopped Mike

from word vomiting at that precise moment. "You... you do?" He hadn't been aware that El actually understood the concept of love.

El smiled sweetly at him. "Yes."

Mike was unsure as to whether he would faint, laugh, scream or sigh with relief. *Oh my god. She actually said it back. Since when does she know about love? Did Nancy teach her about it? Or Hopper? No, it couldn't have been him, it must've been Nancy. I should ask her later. Shit shit shit. Oh my god. She's still looking at me. Should I say it back? But I said it earlier, so I don't need to, right? Oh shit. She's expecting me to say something. What do I-*

But before Mike could finish that thought, he realised that El was slowly reaching her lips up towards his. As Mike moved his head down to meet hers, he tried to think of a single thing that was wrong with his life in that exact moment, but he came up empty. He'd imagined this moment for over a year, and now it was finally happening. His nose was just about to touch hers when-

"Mike, wake up, breakfast is ready!"

"El, honey, come and get breakfast!"

Mike sighed heavily and closed his eyes briefly in frustration, resisting the urge to curse loudly. When he opened his eyes again, El was still staring at him, her face also showing signs of disappointment.

"Well, we should go then," Mike sighed, slowly wiggling out of El's grasp, even though he desperately didn't want to. "We should go out separately too, so then they won't think that we were together."

El nodded in understanding as she moved off Mike's lap and stood up, her head hanging limply. "When will we get to do that again?" she asked sadly, her eyes finding Mike's.

Mike was unsure as to which thing she was referring to - their time alone together or their almost-kiss. Maybe both. "I don't know, El," he answered honestly. "But the important thing is that we *will*. I'm gonna visit the cabin as much as I can, okay? And we can still be together



now for a few more days, until I'm back at school."

"Promise?" El asked, a small smile on her lips.

"Promise," Mike reassured, returning the smile. "Now c'mon, we should go. You go first."

He took her hand once more and led her over to the door, not wanting to let go of her ever again.

El opened the bathroom door manually this time, but hesitated for a moment. She turned around to face him again. Before Mike could even register what was happening, El leaned up on her tiptoes and pressed her lips lightly against Mike's cheek. Giving him a wider smile this time, she gently squeezed his hand before letting go of it and went out the bathroom door, not breaking eye contact with Mike until the gap in the door eventually closed and broke it for them.

Mike stood there in complete shock, his cheeks feeling like they were on absolute fire. He raised his hand up to the spot where her lips had met his cheek, and grinned like an idiot. A few moments later, he heard Joyce's voice welcoming El and asking her if she had had a good sleep. Mike shook his head in disbelief, unable to comprehend how much happiness he was feeling at that moment.

Although those three-hundred-and-fifty-three-days had been in absolute agony, Mike was beginning to realise, with the feel of El's lips still lingering on his cheek, that maybe those days in agony would be worthwhile after all.